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## THE WAY OF THESE WOMEN

Continued from page 12

replied calmly. "If their coming is a necessity, I am prepared to accept it. I wish you would keep quiet now. I am sure it would be better for you."

The dying man opened and closed the fingers of his hand, which lay upon the coverlet. His eyes were fixed upon the ceiling. "I can't make up—my mind. Women are—devils!"

He closed his eyes. One of the doctors approached the bedside. He waved Jermyn away.

"You had better leave him now," he whispered.

"He wants to tell me something!" Jermyn exclaimed hoarsely. "I don't think that I had better go away. He would rather tell me than anyone. He is going to tell us who shot him!"

The doctor shook his head gravely. "There is no question about his telling anybody anything more," he said. "Lord Lakenham is passing away. He will never open his lips again."

### CHAPTER XVII

PERHAPS, in its way, the final shock of Lakenham's death brought with it a certain grim sense of relief; an end, at any rate, of the terrible tension of the last few hours. Jermyn made his way unsteadily into his own bedroom and threw himself upon the sofa. For an hour or so he dozed. At six o'clock a servant brought him some tea. Afterward he mechanically took a bath and changed his clothes. At seven o'clock he knocked at the door of the sitting room of Lucille's little suite. Her maid admitted him at once. Lucille herself, fully dressed in plain dark clothes, was sitting at her table writing letters. Her eyes followed the disappearing figure of the maid. As soon as the door was closed she leaned toward Jermyn.

"It is all over, then?" she whispered. "He is dead?"

"He is dead!" She drew a little breath. Her tone was unsteady. "Has he told the truth?" she asked eagerly. "Is anyone implicated? Did he say anything to you?"

Jermyn shook his head. "He made no statement at all," he replied. "He spoke to me. He was hesitating as to how much he should tell. Even as he was hesitating he died."

"You are sure he told the doctors nothing when you were out of the room?"

"I am quite sure." Lucille sat for a few minutes with her eyes half closed. Her lips moved as though speaking to herself. Then she drew a long sigh and rose to her feet. She went over to Jermyn and, passing her arm through his, led him to an easy chair. A coffee tray stood upon the table.

"Jermyn dear," she said, "I want you to try and pull yourself together. I know that this has all been very horrible. You have had two shocks—the tragedy of poor Aynsworth's death under your own roof, and the tragedy of that terrible secret. You will have to be a man and face it, Jermyn. There is no other way. We shall need all our courage, both you and I, if that secret is to be properly kept."

He lifted his eyes to hers. There were black rims underneath them, and his cheeks seemed to have become hollower. The shock had aged him. "I shall face it," he assured her. "There is no doubt about that. The question that concerns me most for the present is what you are going to do."

SHE busied herself for a moment making some coffee; then she turned and looked at him steadfastly. "Jermyn," she said, "all the excitement of the last few hours seems to have left me nerveless. I can talk quite calmly now of things that in themselves sound terrible. I am going to make a bargain with you."

"Well?"

"I am going to speak the naked truth," she went on. "Some of the things I shall say you may not like. Nevertheless, listen patiently. I have no love for Sybil Cluley. You are an idealist, Jermyn, and all your days you will be a little out of touch with a world that has been fashioned by practical people, whose main roads and byways lead to the obvious places. Sybil Cluley is just a little girl upon the stage, who has been clever enough, when one of her secrets has been found out, to strike hard for herself and her future. She isn't what you think her, Jermyn. She isn't anything at all wonderful. She would have made you a good little wife, I dare say, and probably she would have settled down here quite contentedly. She might even have been faith-

ful to you. But beyond that she wasn't in the least like the woman you ought to marry."

"I am listening patiently," he remarked; "but I do not agree with a single word. The woman whom a man ought to marry is the woman who, in some mysterious way, has made for herself a place that no other woman could make in the heart of the man who covets her. There is no universal standard of suitability,—you must know that yourself very well,—or all men would desire the same woman. I feel for Sybil what I have felt for no one else in my life, what I shall never feel for any other woman. I cannot listen to a single word against her. I do not believe a single word against her!"

She leaned a little forward. "You believe—in your heart you know that she killed Aynsworth?" she declared firmly.

Jermyn opened his lips and closed them again. She leaned a little closer still.

"I am not sure, even," she went on, watching him closely, "that Aynsworth, if he spoke to you at all, did not let fall some word; did not, directly or indirectly, confirm this."

Jermyn covered his face with his hands. A sudden light flashed in Lucille's eyes. When Jermyn looked up he seemed older. "Lucille," he said, "is this worth while between you and me? Since you force me to it, then suppose I admit that Sybil did kill him? It was done in an impulse of madness. You do not for a moment suppose that I shall not protect her with all my power, by every means I possess?"

"Nothing that you can do," she replied, "will be of any use if I choose to speak out."

"But you won't!"

"On certain terms I shall not," she asserted. "If you refuse my terms, I shall tell the truth."

HE looked at her doubtfully, still without complete understanding.

"An hour or so ago," she continued, dropping her voice a little, "something in the coming of the morning from behind the woods carried me back to the past so overwhelmingly that I was compelled to speak to you of a moment that I have thought of always in my heart with shame. I mean the moment when I begged for a little of your love. No, don't move away. This hurts you to listen to, perhaps; but you must listen! When you told me that you were going to marry Sybil Cluley you gave me the cruellest shock of my life. There was nothing left for me. I am not one of those who can distribute affection, Jermyn. When I love as I love you, as God knows I love you, there can be no other man in the world, there can be no life worth living without you, there can be nothing but misery. Sit still! You must hear me to the end. Twenty-four hours ago it was all over with me. I couldn't even make up my mind what I should do with the wretched fragments of my life. I simply didn't care. Wherever I looked I could see no single ray of joy or happiness, or anything approaching it. The one thing that alone I desired, hopeless as it seemed then, was to separate you and Sybil Cluley. Fate has done that for me."

He moved uneasily in his chair. She held out her hand.

"I know what you are thinking," she went on. "I have brought you face to face with your own problem. You are wondering and wondering. Now listen! I am going to solve that problem for you. I am going to give you no chance to marry a murderer, I am going to give you no chance of heroism. If you want to save this girl from the scaffold, you must marry me and marry me quickly!"

He sprang to his feet. "Lucille!" he cried. "Lucille!"

She rose slowly. She looked at him, looked at him long and steadily, and his heart sank. Then she continued. "That is the price of my silence," she told him deliberately. "I have no liking, no sympathy, for Sybil Cluley. If I am compelled to speak, she will very likely escape the death sentence. She might make a jury believe that she killed Aynsworth in defense of her honor. She is clever enough, I dare say. But even if she is fortunate, she will spend the best years of her youth in prison. I think, Jermyn, that you will save her from that."

It was significant of the conviction her words carried that Jermyn attempted no argument. "You are cruel!" he muttered.

"I may seem so," she replied, "but I am not. I am sacrificing no one, and I am doing what every woman in the world has a right to do,—I am striking one blow for the thing I desire more than anything else in life. And, Jermyn, I shall make you happy. You

may not think so now, but I shall. There is more love for you, more understanding of you, more real sympathy with you, in a single beat of my heart than in any of the false words that little pale-faced chit has ever hammered out to an audience! Go to the window, Jermyn. You see? There is a motorcar coming up the avenue."

He followed her finger. "What of it?"

"Who is in it?" she asked. "There is a policeman on the box," he answered slowly. "Inside—yes, it's Lisgood!—Captain Lisgood!"

"The chief constable of Norfolk," she remarked. "Very well, you have just as long to make up your mind, Jermyn, as it takes that motorcar to deposit its passengers inside this house. As I live, I will send Sybil Cluley to take her trial on the charge of murdering Aynsworth unless you give me your word of honor to marry me within two months! Hesitate, if you like; but every second means a risk. If they come before you have answered me, then I strike."

I ACCEPT," Jermyn agreed swiftly. "I will marry you—I promise no more than that, mind—but I will marry you if those are your terms. Remember that Sybil is to be spared not only the worst, but every breath of suspicion or annoyance, so far as lies in your power."

"She shall be saved from everything," Lucille declared, "from everything."

There was a moment's silence. Jermyn had turned half away. Suddenly Lucille moved a little closer toward him. Her voice, her tone, even her bearing, were suddenly different. Her face seemed younger; her eyes were shining.

"Jermyn," she whispered, "some day or other, believe me, I shall be able to make you forget this morning. It is only because you are a little mad that I have ventured what I have ventured. If I had believed in your love for her, or her love for you, believed in it wholeheartedly, I should have saved her for you—indeed I would. I'd have been just like one of that other poor army of fools, who cut out their own happiness from their heart for the sake of the man they love. But it wouldn't have been of any use, Jermyn. If this all seems theatrical to you, and foolish, and wicked, try and believe that it is only because the circumstances themselves are so wonderful. We will save little Sybil Cluley, and she shall go back to the profession she loves, and I am quite sure that presently she'll settle down happily enough. She can have all the money or the social recognition she wants. We'll make it up to her. And, Jermyn, even if you don't believe it now, I shall teach you to forget her, Dear. I shall teach you to feel in your heart that there was a Providence even in this terrible happening."

She had come quite close to him now. Her head was lifted to his, her beautiful eyes were seeking to draw some answering light; her lips were a little parted, her breath almost was upon his cheek. He caught her hands and held them in a grip of iron; but he held her from him.

"Lucille," he said, "I have accepted your bargain. Don't misunderstand my acceptance. I have listened without protest to all that you have said about Sybil; but to me she is the one woman in the world. I have lived a life of which such men as Lakenham make sport. I am one of those primitive fools who believe in loving only once. I never cared for anyone before I cared for Sybil; I have never told a woman that I cared for her; I don't believe that I have ever looked at a woman as though I cared for her. I gave Sybil my whole heart, and she will have it until the end. I shall marry you to save her from the shadow of disgrace. I can't see that you'll get much out of it. I promise nothing beyond the bare fulfillment of that contract."

She raised his hand to her lips. "They are looking for you downstairs," she murmured.

### CHAPTER XVIII

I CALL it perfectly horrid," Mary declared, as she linked her arm through Jermyn's. "We were having such a lovely time here. I don't want to go a bit."

Jermyn looked down at her pityingly. "You poor child!" he murmured. "It really is hard luck on you. We were going to have such a good time, weren't we?"

Her eyes filled with tears. "I was having such a lovely holiday, and so was Sybil," she went on. "Sybil has been working so hard, and since she came here she seems to have changed. The day before yesterday she was just like she used to be, so happy that she was even singing in her room, singing as she undressed, and singing when she got up in the morning. And now she almost frightens me, she seems so grave and serious. Jermyn, please, you haven't quarreled, have you?"

"Not in the least, Dear," he assured her. "Why should we quarrel? Didn't I send